

Statement of
Wayne H. Brown, P.E., P.S., Southern District Commissioner
Mississippi Transportation Commission
Before the Subcommittee on Highways, Transit and Pipelines
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives
Hearing on Rebuilding Highway and Transit Infrastructure on the MS Gulf Coast
Following Hurricane Katrina - State and Local Officials
October 27, 2005

Mr. Chairman, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Mississippi Department of Transportation's (MDOT) actions resulting from the impact of Hurricane Katrina on our Gulf Coast. Our response to Katrina began before the storm and has continued on a 24 hour, 7 days a week basis since then. Our goals have been to help Mississippi survive the storm and to speed our state's recovery by restoration and rebuilding of its vital transportation systems.

Hurricane Katrina caused an estimated \$695,000,000 in damage to federal aid highways maintained by MDOT. Sixteen hours after Katrina passed all MDOT state maintained routes were open with the exception of the 26-mile stretch of beachfront highway on U.S. 90 and the two major bridges on that route that were destroyed as well. A 312 foot section of east-bound I-10 over the Pascagoula River in Jackson County was destroyed thus closing the interstate in that direction. Within seven days the interstate was open to two-way traffic in both directions. By using contracting procedures previously used in emergencies we were able to repair the damaged bridge and restore the interstate to its full capacity 32 days after Katrina. During the storm the I-110 bridge across the Back Bay of Biloxi was damaged resulting in closing all but one outbound lane. I-110 serves the Biloxi peninsula and prior to Katrina was served by eighteen lanes of traffic (nine in/ nine out). After Katrina this was reduced to five lanes of traffic (three in/ one out). MDOT negotiated a contract with the contractor that was performing the I-10 bridge repair to expedite the repair to the I-110 bridge. After a delayed start due to the advance of Hurricane Rita, the repairs were made and the bridge was fully operational just 38 days after Katrina and access to Biloxi improved to six lanes (three in/ three out). Three force account (no bid) contracts were entered into to repair and open the south (eastbound) lanes of U.S. 90 from Biloxi Bay to the Bay of St. Louis - a distance of 26 miles. This work will be completed by October 29 - two months after Katrina. The cost of restoring these two lanes of traffic is estimated at \$14,000,000. Three contracts have been advertised and competitively bid to restore and open the north (westbound) lanes of traffic. The overall cost for these three

projects was bid at \$11,316,004 and will likely be more than this amount when the work is completed as the bid quantities were roughly estimated. These two efforts were comparative in nature, yet in contracting for this work through force account we are not paying a premium for it. This is evidence that the taxpayer can be well served by force account contracts when they are properly administered as we have demonstrated.

Obviously, an effort of this magnitude takes not only time but also money. At the urging of FHWA and other federal partners, we have moved quickly and dramatically in our efforts. On the assurance of FHWA and others that we would be quickly and fully reimbursed, we have diverted millions of dollars previously targeted to other critical projects into the accelerated Katrina effort. In order for MDOT to continue funding emergency repairs to federal aid highways in the affected areas, we are in desperate need of an appropriation from Congress of FHWA Emergency Relief (ER) funds. MDOT cannot continue to fund its existing program of work that is already under contract and also fund critical emergency repairs in South Mississippi with only its regular funds.

MDOT's budget consists primarily of state fuel taxes and reimbursements from FHWA with federal aid funds for monies spent on federal aid projects. Our current budget is committed to an existing program of work that is already underway and under contract. MDOT's current FY06 Budget was already extremely tight and challenging due to the legislative transfers of MDOT funds that occurred in FY 2003-2005. We are diligently trying to keep that existing program of work on track and to meet our existing contractual obligations.

Even with our challenging budget year, MDOT immediately began debris removal from state highways when Katrina's winds died down. MDOT quickly let emergency contracts to repair damage to bridges and highways in the impacted areas. A miniscule amount of this work went to out-of-state contractors. Restoring immediate access to the impacted areas was vital such that search and rescue operations could commence and emergency workers could reach those in the impacted areas that chose not to leave before the storm. MDOT is currently paying for this ER related work with its regular funds while also attempting to meet our financial obligations for our regular program of work already let to contract. In December, we will let emergency design-build contracts to replace the two U.S. Highway 90 bridges washed away by Katrina. The estimated total cost for these structures is \$400,000,000. The bridge contracts will be tied to a completion date that could be as short as 11 months. In the next 12 months we anticipate spending up to \$100,000,000 on the roadway section and a good portion of the estimated \$400,000,000 on the two highway bridges in order to have transportation along U.S. Highway 90 even partially restored.

Without an immediate appropriation from Congress of additional FHWA ER funds, MDOT will be forced to make a hard decision in the next few weeks. We will either stop work on our regular construction and maintenance program that is already underway or delay the letting of critical emergency repair projects for U.S. Highway 90. This is not a time for slow repayment. It is not a time for government red tape. MDOT is up to the challenges before us but we must be armed with resources and freed of unnecessary red tape and delay. In summary, we have and continue to keep our commitments. It's time now for our federal partners to keep their promises as well. Our critical need at this moment is money in the form of supplemental appropriations and the full reimbursements which have been promised but not

yet delivered. Our state legislature has also approved concurrent resolutions urging the Congress to support the president's waiver of time limitations in federal assistance programs relating to the devastation created by Hurricane Katrina.

MDOT and its partners in the construction industry and engineering professions are ready, willing and able to continue our existing regular program of maintenance and construction under contract. We are also ready, willing and capable of designing and constructing the emergency repairs needed to rebuild Highway 90 and its two bridges, but we can't fund both regular works under contract and emergency repairs.

As we stand here today, thousands of Mississippians still live in tents next to piles of debris which were once their homes. Many still await word from employers that they can come back to work. Roads leading south toward the Gulf Coast are clogged with mobile homes and a wealth of construction materials targeted to address the critical needs these people face. The people behind these recovery resources are sleeping in cars, tents, and on the floors of good samaritans due to the housing crisis in the affected area.

We need flexibility in the form of extended authority and discretion in creating a process which is accountable but also nimble and able to quickly respond to the unfolding challenges as we focus on rebuilding our systems in record time. We ask that more authority be given to us, the state highway agency and the FHWA Division office during the early days and weeks of a disaster. When you see the thousands of trucks, emergency vehicles and relief workers backed up in long delays decisions are based upon the circumstances that are at hand. We in Mississippi are convinced that overall we have made good decisions and have been careful in our actions. In hindsight, we know that each and every action we have taken may not pass muster. But, on a whole we have and will continue to be conservative and careful in our actions.

We know that you want to help and we thank you for the substantial help already being provided. We pledge to be good stewards of the resources we have. But in all candor, they are not sufficient for the enormous task before us. We seek your leadership in arming MDOT with the resources necessary to restore our transportation systems. In turn, we promise a supreme and successful effort in reaching that goal. We appreciate the help of FHWA through Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta and Acting FHWA Administrator Rick Capka, who have been most helpful along with their employees at the Division level.

Mr. Chairman, members, thank you for this opportunity to come before you and express our situation and our needs. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have for me.

**Impact of Hurricane Katrina to MDOT
Damage to Federal Aid Highways -- \$695 Million
Breakout by Fiscal Year**

	FY06	FY07	Total
US Hwy-90 Roadway	\$70 million	\$30 million	\$100 million
US Hwy-90 Bridge at Bay St. Louis	\$100 million	\$100 million	\$200 million
US Hwy-90 Bridge at Biloxi/Ocean Springs	\$100 million	\$100 million	\$200 million
Debris Removal State Hwys	\$60 million	\$40 million	\$100 million
Debris Removal County Routes (Federal Aid Eligible)	\$30 million	\$5 million	\$ 35 million
Contingencies and Miscellaneous (lighting, guard rails, signals, etc.)	\$30 million	\$20 million	\$ 50 million
Restore I-10 and I-110	\$10 million	--	\$ 10 million
TOTAL	\$400 million	\$295 million	\$695 million